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FRANK M. HOLLISTER

BY CHARLES P. NORTON



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One day in the year 1871 or 1872, Carleton Sprague and I, then boys of thirteen or fourteen years of age, and great chums, walked into the Young Men's Association Library. Those of you who remember the Y. M. A. Library standing on the present site of the Iroquois Hotel, remember the round,cooped-in librarian's desk with the little case by its side containing the stock of the Library's magazines. Standing at this case and running rather discontentedly over the magazines, stood a young man whom I can describe by no other word than beautiful. He was neither of slight nor heavy build, and of a body well proportioned, athletic, and vigorous. His features were masculine, and delicately and clearly cut. His head suggested to me the marble head of the Young Augustus, and he carried it with a poise of much grace and dignity. Though I did not come to know him well until nearly fifteen years afterward, I at once gave this beautiful young man the quick born adoration of boyhood, and I whispered to Carleton Sprague, "Who is this man?" and he replied, "Frank Hollister, who has come back to Buffalo to live, and has gone on the *Express*. Isn't he good looking!"

I do not think this composed young man of thirty even noticed those two lads who were whispering about him and staring at him with such hearty admiration. I do not think he ever gave a thought to the fact, even if he knew it, that his face was a passport to the good will of strangers. I came to know it well in later years, and to know that one of the many reasons that made Mr. Hollister attractive to men was that his face was an open book, where all men might read the qualities they best love to find—strength,

1. Paper read before the Saturn Club of Buffalo.

honesty, intelligence, and genial, cordial companionableness. It was a thoughtful face in repose; in conversation it lighted up with fun, or with earnestness. It was at all times intellectual and keen. It reflected his extraordinary placidity and evenness of temper. I have been on a fishing excursion with Mr. Hollister and his son Evan on Lake Ontario, when the thermometer stood at 100 in the shade; the mosquitoes 1,000; the eggs we had brought along to eat were fit company only for a setting hen; the chickens long past the time when even a storage warehouse man would have sold them; and finally Mr. Hollister had managed to get a fish bone in his throat from the one demented black bass we had succeeded in catching. Yet he never for a moment lost his temper, nor did his face express even annoyance. I remember that at stated intervals Evan Hollister kept pouring pails of water over me to keep me cool, and I wanted Sir Isaac Walton's works burned by the common hangman.

I did not come to know Mr. Hollister well until sometime in 1887 or 1888, and he was in middle life. He was born in Buffalo November 28, 1843, and in his boyhood lived in what most of us knew as President Fillmore's house on Niagara Square, now the Castle Inn. His own recollections of his early life are stated with the quiet humor than ran throughout his writings and conversation. "Historic times," he says in his paper on "Early Buffalo Characters," "really dawned on my own personal consciousness with the narrow escape I had from being killed by an enraged sow on Delaware Avenue near Mohawk Street. In those days swine and cattle were allowed to roam for forage in the streets of this as of other American cities, greatly to the disgust of Mrs. Trollope, Charles Dickens, and other fastidious travelers. Misconstruing my attempt to pet one of her progeny, the animal charged with fury, bowled me over, and I have always understood that I was saved from

the ignominious fate of being reduced to sausage meat then and there by the timely interposition of a chance passerby. Strangely enough, this gruesome incident, vividly stamped on my memory, has never impaired in the slightest degree my lifelong fondness for pigs, more especially I should say in the sublimated form of spare-ribs, bacon, and sausages.”

As a boy he first went to the Buffalo public schools, but prepared for Harvard College at the Sanborn School at Concord, Massachusetts.

In a paper delivered by him before the Thursday Club in 1913, and entitled “Concord and Concord People,” he gave intimations of his delightful life there. The paper in the main is devoted to describing with a loving and sympathetic pen the characteristics of Concord itself and the worthies whom he had seen at Concord—Emerson, Hawthorne, Thoreau, Ellery Channing, Bronson Alcott, and the brothers Hoar. But he gives a glimpse of his own life, too.

May I be pardoned [he says], for dwelling a moment on this happy experience. It has been said there never was and there never will be such a genial Concord, for young people at least, as that which existed from 1859 to 1865. . . . Among the pupils at that school (meaning the one he attended) were Edward and Edith Emerson, Sam Hoar, and Rose Hawthorne. All that I recall of Mr. Emerson was his beautiful smile as he came in to see the young people when we were invited to small parties at his house. It was either at the Emerson house, or at Mrs. Cheney’s that a number of pupils performed a wonderful representation of the “Babes in the Wood,” Mr. Sanborn, six feet six inches tall, being “First Robin.” Perhaps the most vivid of my recollections of those school days at Concord is the grim round head figure of John Brown on the platform of the Town Hall, telling the story of his fights with the border ruffians and the death of his son. I don’t remember what the collection amounted to on that occasion, but the old hero got all the money and nearly all the jewelry there was in the hall.

And Mr. Hollister closes this paper with the characteristic comment on Mr. Sanborn, his old teacher, who was a red-hot abolitionist and supporter of John Brown: “As I met him at Harvard Commencement last June, I presume he still lives and thrives in his natural element which may

be not unfairly described as hot water, tempered with tobasco sauce."

Mr. Hollister entered Harvard College in 1861, and graduated in 1865. There the impetus of his Concord life was carried on. He was an omnivorous reader of the best literature, was *Kritanous* of the Hasty Pudding Club, and gave a foretaste of the literary ability which was verified in his later life. After his graduation he entered the employ of Sawyer, Mansfield & Co., wholesale drygoods merchants in Boston, but in 1870 came back to Buffalo, and engaged for a time in the coal business with his brother, Mr. E. P. Hollister. In the spring of 1872 he became one of the staff of the *Express*; its associate editor in 1875, and its manager in 1876. In 1877 he left the *Express* and became an associate editor of the *Buffalo Commercial*, and held this place until he retired from business after a service on the paper of over thirty years. During much or all of this time he had charge of "Table Talk," and while he wrote many editorials, it is nevertheless through "Table Talk" that we best knew Mr. Hollister. I have sought at many sources to find some scrap-book or collection of what Mr. Hollister wrote when on the *Buffalo Commercial*, so that I might show more clearly the force, the insight, the humor, and the wide vision and culture embodied in "Table Talk" and his editorials. I have been unable to find any such record. I even started to trace his individuality by reading the old newspaper files, but twelve or fifteen feet of solid newspaper, and even more the impossibility of identifying his authorship, made me abandon this course. For once in getting up a printed menu for a banquet of jovial elderly Buffalo gentlemen, I added a warning advisory verse I had found in the memorabilia of the Saturn Club, and which as I remember it, ran:

"When foolish mortals stoop to folly
And find too late that wines betray,
The best thing they can take is Polly,
And spend their time in bed next day."

And some humorous reporter ascribed this "lyric" to a man by name who never was guilty of writing a verse in his life. I had a very bad quarter of an hour with the alleged author, and a very wrathful letter from the real one. The fact is that "Table Talk," while it was Mr. Hollister's work, was also the work of the whole *Commercial* staff. When anyone saw or thought of anything good, he would file it under "Table Talk" and then it would be culled out and printed in the column. It reflected Mr. Hollister personally, not only in the humor of his own writings, but in the refined humor of its editing. The critics and humorists, from Aristotle, Dryden, Montaigne, and Locke, down through Addison, Pope, Charles Lamb, and Sydney Smith, even to that great humorist and Epicurian critic, Tammias Haggart, have expended reams of paper and ink in dissecting wit and humor, and explaining what they were, for the benefit of a world that wanted to laugh, until the merry-makers turned mourners over the scattered, bleaching remains of what in its happier days, before the professional wits got hold of it, had once been a joke. Their theses had one satisfactory result, however. They demonstrated one thing very clearly, which was that none of them knew really what humor was, except that it was something at which a great many people united in laughing, without causticity, and in the spirit of genial, friendly, cordial kindness. How many hundreds, yes, thousands, have so laughed at "Table Talk." It rested you when you were tired. It brightened dull evenings.

The world has been too much accustomed to regard as wit and humor something that makes its butt ridiculous or uncomfortable. In "Table Talk" there was nothing of this. It was always kindly. Moreover, it had the essential quality of the best humor in that it gave with light touch the humorous side of the current topics and thoughts of contemporaneous life. What a revelation it must have

been to the world when the *Tattler*, the *Spectator*, and the *Guardian* began to gossip about the political and literary disputes, the fine gentlemen and ladies, the characters of men, the humors of society, the new book and the new play, of the days of Queen Anne. The austerities of Bacon's essays were replaced with the fine and tender humor of Addison and Steele, that was never bitter. Oh that the devotees of Doucet of 1917 would read the gentle satire of Paper No. 100 of the *Guardian* on the tucker, and the consequent papers on the short skirt! And there are other papers, too. It is one of the many literary crimes of that dictator of the Georges, the great Dr. Samuel Johnson, that the ponderous style of the *Rambler* and *Idler* set a standard of literary taste which deprived the approved style of his day of all the lightness and grace of the *Tattler*, *Spectator*, *Guardian*, and the *Freeholder*. The good Doctor had, no doubt, the best intentions. He certainly had a hearty belief in the grandeur of his own literary style, but nevertheless he does remind one of one of the fables of G. Washington Aesop, which were famous in the '70's, and which I saw quoted in "Table Talk" a great many years ago:

"A kind-hearted she elephant, while walking through the jungle where the spicy breezes blew soft o'er Ceylon's Isle, haplessly set foot upon a partridge, which she crushed to death within a few inches of the nest containing its callow brood. 'The poor little thing!' said the generous mammoth. 'I have been a mother myself, and my affection shall atone for the fatal consequences of my neglect.' So saying, she sat down upon the orphan birds." G. Washington Aesop then continues, perhaps irrelevantly, I admit: "The above teaches us what home is without a mother; also, that it is not every person who should be entrusted with the care of an orphan asylum."

But whether or not the moral of G. Washington Aesop is irrelevant, the fact is that the elephantine Dr. Johnson, with his Rasselasian style did smash flat the charming grace of Addison and Steele, so that when the wonderful "Essays of Elia" appeared, Charles Lamb had difficulty in obtaining recognition as anything other than a flippant, light-minded person. The literary world was too much like *Miss Deborah Jenkins* in "Cranford," who adored Dr. Johnson, and despised the "Pickwick Papers."

Mr. Hollister's work in "Table Talk" was a modernized newspaperized, condensed, impersonal *Spectator*, of laconic, pithy comment, funny stories, charming verses—and it was so pleasant! It is a great regret that I have been unable to weave extracts from it into this part of this paper, bearing upon Mr. Hollister's literary side. The most of Mr. Hollister's identified writings are Thursday Club papers, and these cover a wide variety of subjects. He wrote of Anthony Trollope, Samuel Pepys, Napoleon III, Charles James Fox, Napoleon Bonaparte, Francis Jeffrey, and Cecil John Rhodes. He wrote of the effect of socialism on family relationship, and of the dangers of the aggregation of wealth. He wrote of the anti-Semetic mania, and how we should govern our colonies. Some of these papers I have heard, some I have read, and so far as my acquaintance with them goes, I have been struck with how much his newspaper training aided in making effective his treatment of the subject he had in hand. Whatever else may be said of newspapers as literature, one thing must be admitted, and that is, they never sidetrack the attention or interest of the reader with words. Newspaper men from the cub reporter to the chief, are trained to get the marrow of the matter before their readers, and they do it. This to me is a salient characteristic of the papers of Mr. Hollister which I have read.

Another is his evident culture. He was like Charles Lamb in some things. He loved books. They really educated him. He had the same gentle humor. And in these Thursday Club papers you find the newspaper man's capacity for setting forth in a plain convincing way, all there was worth having on the subject chosen, with the most highly developed, cultured taste, and illuminated with the most subtle, charming, refined humor that never blunted its force or debased its elevated thought. I have often thought that had he gone into literature professionally he would have stood side by side with Tarkington, Martin, Crothers, Ade, Dunne, Field, Howells, and the glorious company of the immortals of this generation that have made American humor famous.

I am sorry that the time allotted to this paper does not give scope for mention of other sides of his character which we all knew. None knew better than I of his work in the University of Buffalo—his fearlessness, his fair-mindedness, and his faithfulness in the performance of whatever work or duty his hand found to do, and all his work interwoven with the same gentle humor. I remember once, wearing a necktie as red as any British uniform, and going out with Mr. Hollister one seventeenth of March with him to beg for subscriptions for the University. We tramped, tramped, tramped all day, and never got a cent. When sitting down despondent, I moaned: "What can be the reason for such luck?" He was very tired, but he looked up with the same old cheery smile, and said: "It is St. Patrick working against your cravat." I am sorry there is not time to tell you of that part of his life which was devoted to the service of the public. He took an active part in the affairs of the Historical Society, of the Educational Union, of the Buffalo Library, of the Fine Arts Academy, of the Saturn Club, of the Thursday Club, of the University Club, of the Unitarian Church, of the Harvard

Club, and so on. In all of these he was conspicuous for good counsel.

But I do want, in closing, to recall to you a picture of his home life which so many of us knew, and which he and we loved so well. I love best to think of it in winter, when we all sat in a circle in the back parlor, and the snow and the cold and the wind were outside. Ah! those were *noctes ambrosianae*. How the talk ranged! Books, men, events, anecdotes, politics, sport—honest, hearty, kindly laughter, talk from which all evil thinking slunk, and where was only charity and gentleness. And always someone would say, "Let's read something," and that he loved above all else. I can shut my eyes and see it now. He would go to the easy leather chair by the round table on the side of the room, and putting on his glasses, begin with that rich, cordial voice of his (I am going to read you what he read to me fifteen years ago, at the time of the Clarence Howard silver wedding):

"Phwat's the distoorbance about at the Howards', this night?" said Mr. Hennessey, laying down the evening paper.

"The Clarence O'Howards'?" Mr. Dooley inquired.

"The same," said Mr. Hennessey.

"Well, now, 'tis queer about that," said Mr. Dooley. "Did ye iver hear of the Woman's Exchange, Hinnissey? No? Well, 'tis strange. Ye musht hear somet'ing—and it's as common as candidates in many places. In New York, Chicago, and South Dakoty, the most lucrative department of the legal profession, Hinnissey, is the Woman's Exchange. 'Tis a favorite, I'm towld, wid the great lawyers and judges. And this is the way it works: Whin a gintleman tires of his wife—as he naturally does in a few years, for she soon fades while he grows wiser and better and handsomer all the time—he just goes to the Woman's Exchange, pays the lawyer and the judge the regular price, and gets another wan. 'Tis a grand systom, Hinnissey."

"It looks aisy," said Mr. Hennessey. "But do they give a man much of a ch'ice?"

"They'se always a fine assortment on hand, I'm towld," said Mr. Dooley. "Luk around and suit yer fancy," says the custogian, or counsel for the offinse, politely. 'Av ye don't see pwhat ye want,' he says, 'ask for it,' says he. 'These is all first-class, bon-ton, matrimonial misfits,' he says; 'but 'tis hard lines if they don't fit annybody,' says he. 'Cheer up,' he says, 'the worst is yet to come. Change partners; he calls off—like the coon at the San Sauey Sociable, d'ye

mind, Hinnissey?—and, be jagers, they do change, while ye wait, as ye may say.”

“Isn’t it agin the law?” asked Mr. Hennessey.

“It is—agin some kinds of law,” said Mr. Dooley. “Says Father Kelley to me, only last week, ‘Behowld,’ he says, ‘pwhat’s the howly state of matrimony coming to?’ he says. ‘Oh trumperry! Oh Morris!’ he says. But in Buffalo, Hinnissey, ’tis different. In Buffalo they’re so far behind the metropolitan styles, in spite of their asphalt and their Pan-American Exposition, that Woman’s Exchange is not known there. They have nothing, I’m towld, Hinnissey, nearer to ut than Dr. Linn’s Anatomical Museum, and that’s wax, and not the real t’ing. Naw, sor, the min in Buffalo are that hopeless and old-fashioned, Hinnissey, that whin one of thim is caught and married, that’s the ind of him. They’s no exchange and no discharge fur him in this wourld. He just lies down, Hinnissey, I’m towld, and hugs his chains. He t’inks he’s livin’ in Paradise Row, mind ye, and ye can’t pry the crool delusion out of his thick head with a crow-bar. He’s that domesticated, Hinnissey, ’tis a shstudy for his wife to get him away from the premises while they’re clanin’ house.”

“Haven’t they anny clubs in Buffalo?” asked Mr. Hennessey.

“Clubs?” said Mr. Dooley. “Ye can’t club the min to the clubs in Buffalo. They’s a Woman’s Club that does a good business, but frequenting a min’s club, Hinnissey, is next dure to solitary confinement. It is so. Ah! the married women in Buffalo have much to answer fur in the matter of breaking up happy club-life in that town, so they tell me. A few of the ould settlers do gather at their club of a Saturday night, now and thin, drawn be the magnet of a free lunch, but ’tis a sad sight, Hinnissey, to see thim pretending to be gay and so divilish tough. It is so.”

“And so,” continued Mr. Dooley. “the poor fellys go on, year after year, living contintedly—wud ye belave it, Hinnissey? wid wan wife, *ad infinitum* and *ad nauseam*, as Casey’s girl wud say. And whin this praypostherous billin’ and cooin’ has lasted twenty-five years, all the fri’nds and neighbors are invited in to help celebrate the event—as if ’twas something to be proud and happy about. Like winning a fight agin odds for mumber of the Legislature. Shure a hin wid wan chicken, Hinnissey, is a picture av humility and discouragement be the side av a Buffalo man wid wan wife—and her the same wan.”

“But pwhat’s all this to do wid the trouble at the Howards’ to-night,” asked Mr. Hennessey, recalling the text.

“Why, man, ’tis wan of these exhibitions of middle-aged turtle-doves that the O’Howards is givin’ this evening, wid the aid an’ connivance of their fri’ns. The tichnical name fur it is the ‘Silver Wedding.’ Kape clear of ut, Hinnissey. ’Tis a sickening sight fur self-respectin’ bachelors like us.”

“Fur me own part,” said Mr. Hennessey, somewhat puzzled, and scanning Mr. Dooley’s stern countenance with suspicion, “I ’tink ye like the Buffalo style yerself, better nor the New York and Chicago—the ‘Silver Wedding,’ a good deal better nor the Woman’s Exchange, fur all yer palaverin.”

“Hinnissey,” said Mr. Dooley, slowly closing one eye—“ye’re a wizzard!”

So, with his old sayings and half-forgotten things, I have tried to evoke our friend from the past. It has been a pleasant task. As I look back, there come the echoes of dead laughter along the paths of memory; the thoughts of many a chat in the soft warm darkness of summer nights; of many a winter evening passed by his fireside; of idle hours spent in travel and in vacation. He used to call me "that middle-aged young bachelor," and these kinetoscopic figures of the drama of the past days move past with the vigor and the ardor, and the joy of living, of the morning and the springtime. It is as though men and women could never become old and tired; as though Charles Lamb never could have sung his song:

"I have had friends, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school days.
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

Gone before, perhaps, but not gone; for nothing can kill the sweetness and the joy of old and pleasant memories while human beings can remember. There may be a tinge of sadness in our sincerest laughter, but it is none the less sweet for all that.

I hope this half hour has brought back to you also such pleasant recollections of some of the many sides of Mr. Hollister's nature. His character touched those of so many different kinds of men and women. "The great wits I have conversed with," said Mr. Addison, "are men eminent for their humanity." And humanity is as good a word as any other for the different qualities we all saw and loved in him. His humanity manifested itself in sympathy, in understanding, in responsiveness, in making bountiful return to the affection brought by others to him. It manifested itself, too, in the humanity that Addison referred to. "Mr. Hollister," said Mr. Louis L. Babcock in his remarks made in the Council of the University of Buffalo at the time of Mr. Hollister's death, "was one of that line of men such as

Orsamus H. Marshall, E. Carleton Sprague, and James O. Putnam, who have kept alive the true spirit of culture here." His was indeed true culture—not the Pharisaic ostentation of the cult of books, but that culture which is true education, and which draws forth manhood by contact with the best minds, until it has broadened to something of the breadth of humanity.

What his friends saw of this was that he was a strong and faithful friend; a simple, unaffected, courteous, charming gentleman; a clear-headed thinker; an inspiring talker upon the more serious subjects of thought. And while he and you and I have laughed together at the things we used to laugh at in the good old days, perhaps you have thought pleasantly of these other phases of his personality which I have not dwelt upon, of these wholesome, ennobling characteristics of a wise, good, strong man.



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